

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
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R 100545Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7673
AMEMBASSY LISBON
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PDIP, IS, PO
SUBJECT: CONFLICTING REPORTS ON STATUS OF ISRAEL -PORTUGAL
RELATIONS

SUMMARY: THE PRESS HAS CARRIED CONFLICTING REPORTS
SUGGESTING THAT LISBON IS RECONSIDERING ITS DECISION
TO ESTABLISH FULL RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. A FOREIGN
MINISTRY OFFICIAL CONFIRMED THAT JERUSALEM HAD RECEIVED
ASSURANCES OF NO CHANGE IN PORTUGAL'S POLICY.
WELL AWARE OF THE PRESSURES ARAB CAPITALS ARE EXERTING,
ISRAELIS APPEAR CONCERNED. A REVERSAL BY LISBON WOULD
BE VIEWED HERE GRAVELY--FOR ITS OWN SAKE AND FOR THE
EFFECT IT MIGHT HAVE ON MADRID'S POLICY TOWARD
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ESTABLISHING RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. END SUMMARY.

1. REPORTS HAVE APPEARED HERE THAT LISBON IS
RECONSIDERING ITS DECISION OF LAST MAY TO OPEN A
DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN ISRAEL. ON AUGUST 5 THE LOCAL
PRESS FEATURED A PURPORTED STATEMENT IN LISBON BY A
PORTUGUESE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESMAN THAT HIS

GOVERNMENT HAD ABANDONED ITS INTENTION TO ESTABLISH FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. THE STORY NOTED THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT FOLLOWED A REPORT IN THE EGYPTIAN DAILY, AL AHRAH, THAT SAUDI ARABIA HAD DECIDED TO FREEZE ITS POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH PORTUGAL IF LISBON PROCEEDS WITH ITS PLANS TO EXCHANGE AMBASSADORS WITH ISRAEL.

2. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY A STORY ON AUGUST 7 DATED LISBON CLAIMING THAT PORTUGUESE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS WERE ATTEMPTING TO ALLAY ISRAELI FEARS CONCERNING THE STATUS OF THEIR RELATIONS. IT QUOTED AN OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN AS SAYING THE PORTUGUESE POSITION REMAINED THAT LISBON WOULD OPEN A MISSION "AT AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT," WHILE DECLINING TO SAY WHEN THAT WOULD BE. AT THE SAME TIME THE GOVERNMENT PRESS BULLETIN CARRIED THE FOLLOWING ITEM: BEGIN TEXT. (JERUSALEM) - IN REPLY TO A QUESTION, THE SPOKESMAN OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS STATED TODAY THAT ISRAEL'S EMBASSY IN LISBON HAD CLARIFIED THE SITUATION MENTIONED IN THE COMMUNICATION MEDIA REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PORTUGUESE EMBASSY IN ISRAEL. THE ISRAEL EMBASSY WAS AUTHORITATIVELY INFORMED THAT NO CHANGE HAS OCCURRED IN THE POSITION OF PORTUGAL, WHOSE GOVERNMENT REMAINED TRUE TO THE CONTENTS AND SPIRIT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF THE JOINT STATEMENT OF BOTH GOVERNMENTS REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AS PUBLISHED ON 13 MAY 1977, WHICH INCLUDED, INTER ALIA, THE INTENT OF THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT TO OPEN AN EMBASSY IN ISRAEL IN DUE COURSE. END TEXT.

3. WE SOUGHT CLARIFICATION FROM DAVID ASEK, NEWLY APPOINTED DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE MFA EUROPEAN DIVISION I (WHICH INCLUDES THE UK, SCANDINAVIA AND IBERIAN PENINSULA). HE FURNISHED BACKGROUND ON THE SOMEWHAT CONFUSING PICTURE CONVEYED IN THE PRESS. REFERRING TO THE JOINT MAY 13 ANNOUNCEMENT, HE SAID THAT LISBON HAD REFUSED AT THAT TIME TO INCLUDE A SENTENCE SPECIFYING A DATE BUT THAT PORTUGUESE OFFICIALS HAD GIVEN THE ISRAELIS TO UNDERSTAND IT WOULD BE TOWARD THE END OF THE YEAR. HE ADDED THAT ISRAEL HAD RECEIVED ASSURANCES "AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL" THAT AN EMBASSY WOULD BE OPENED IN ISRAEL IN OCTOBER OR NOVEMBER, 1977.

4. ASEK WENT ON TO GIVE US A CHRONOLOGY OF REACTIONS, CHIEFLY FROM ARAB CAPITALS. IT INCLUDED LIBYA'S

RECALL OF ITS CHARGE IN LISBON, NORTH YEMEN'S SEVERANCE OF RELATIONS (CONSISTING OF A NON-RESIDENT AMBASSADOR), AND THE CANCELLATION OF A PROJECTED \$100 MILLION LOAN BY THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES. ASEK STATED THAT THROUGH IT ALL PORTUGAL STOOD FAST AND, IN FACT, STEPS TOWARD NORMILIZATION CONTINUED. FOR EXAMPLE, THE THEN MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, AHARON UZAN, VISITED PORTUGAL IN JUNE--THE FIRST EVER VISIT BY AN ISRAELI MINISTER. ON JUNE 27, PRIME MINISTER SOARES DECLARED THAT DESPITE PRESSURES PORTUGAL WOULD PROCEED TO ESTABLISH FULL RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. IN THE LATTER

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HALF OF JULY SAUDI ARABI AND EGYPT AGREED TO PLACE THE ISSUE OF PORTUGUESE RELATIONS ON THE AGENDA OF THE JULY 25 ARAB LEAGUE MEETING. SUBSEQUENTLY, PORTUGAL DISTRIBUTED A LETTER AT THE UN EXPLAINING AND JUSTIFYING ITS MOVE TO ESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL WHILE RESTATING ITS TRADITIONAL POLICY TOWARD THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT, I.E., SUPPORTING ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PALESTINIAN STATE. ON JULY 30

AN ARAB LEAGUE OFFICIAL ASKED LISBON TO FREEZE ITS RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND TO TAKE SOME POSITIVE STEPS TOWARDS THE ARABS ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE, INCLUDING RECOGNITION OF THE PLO AND PERMISSION FOR IT TO OPEN AN OFFICE IN PORTUGAL. ON AUGUST 4 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CAME THE AL AHRAH STORY AND THE PORTUGUESE ANNOUNCEMENT INDICATING A REVERSAL ON POLICY AS NOTED ABOVE.

5. ASEK SAID THAT THE AUGUST 4 LISBON ANNOUNCEMENT WAS IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION FROM A JOURNALIST; HE BELIVED THE JOURNALIST REPRESENTED A FRENCH NEWSPAPER. REFERRING TO THE RECENT FRENCH DECISION TO EXCLUDE THE MIDDLE EAST FROM ITS ANTI-BOYCOTT LAW, ASEK LEFT THE IMPLICATION THAT THE JOURNALIST'S QUSTION WAS OFFICIALLY INSPIRED BY PARIS. HE SAID THAT THE PROTUGUESE STATEMENT DENYING THAT THERE HAD BEEN ANY CHANGE IN POLICY HAD COME FROM THE MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL. PLEADING LACK OF PERSONNEL, THE LATTER HAD STATED THAT ALTHOUGH PORTUGAL DOES NOT INTEND TO OPEN AN EMBASSY IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE WHATEVER IN THE CONTENT OR SPIRIT OF ITS MAY 13 STATEMENT.

6. ASEK VIEWS THE SITUATION CAUTIOUSLY AND, NOTWITHSTANDING THE ASSURANCE OF THE PORTUGUESE DIRECTOR GENERAL, WITH SOME CONCERN. HE BELIEVES THAT THE PROTUGUESE ARE ATTEMPTING TO SIGNAL SOMETHING TO THE ARABS. HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT LISBON IS NERVOUSLY EYEING THE IMPENDING MEETING OF ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS IN SEPTEMBER PRIOR TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, KNOWING THAT PORTUGAL IS ON THE FOREIGN MINISTERS' AGENDA. HE SAID THAT ISRAEL IS PARTICULARLY UNHAPPY WITH EGYPT'S CENTRAL ROLE IN THE PRESSURE BEING PUT ON PORTUGAL, ADDING THAT ISRAEL PLACES GREAT IMPORTANCE ON THE OUTCOME, NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF ITS FLEDGLING RELATIONS WITH PORTUGAL BUT ALSO ON THE LESSON MADRID MIGHT LEARN FROM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PORTUGAL'S EXPERIENCE.

7. COMMENT: THE ISRAELIS WERE DELIGHTED AND A LITTLE SURPRISED WHEN THE GOP CAME THROUGH LAST

MAY ON ITS PROMISE TO ESTABLISH RELATIONS. THEY
TOOK SOME PRIDE IN THE FEELING THAT WHEN A COUNTRY
GOES DEMOCRATIC, RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL CANNOT BE
IGNORED. AWARE OF PORTUGAL'S VULNERABILITY TO ARAB
PRESSURES, LIKE THAT OF MANY OTHER SMALL COUNTRIES,
THEY ALSO ASCRIBED LISBON'S DECISION TO THE FRATERNAL
RELATIONS EXISTING BETWEEN THE PORTUGUESE
SOCIALIST PARTY AND ISRAEL'S THEN-RULING LABOR
PARTY. SINCE THEN THEY HAVE ANXIOUSLY AWAITED THE
ASSIGNMENT OF A PORTUGUESE AMBASSADOR. AS ASEX
NOTED, PORTUGAL'S MOVES, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, ARE
EXPECTED TO INFLUENCE MADRID'S POLICY TOWARDS
ISRAEL. A PORTUGUESE REVERSAL IN NORMALIZING
RELATIONS WOULD HAVE A STRONG DEPRESSING EFFECT
HERE, REINFORCING THE GENERAL FEELING OF ISRAEL'S
ISOLATION.
LEWIS

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